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Central Intelligence Agency
Office of the Deputy Director for Intelligence

2 February 1984

NOTE TO: Jack F. Matlock
National Security Council
European and Soviet Affairs

Jack

The original of this was provided to John Poindexter. I met with Jeremy this morning to talk about the paper you and he are thinking about and he mentioned your discussions about Dobrynin's status and the request to [redacted] I hope the attached is useful.



Robert M. Gates
Deputy Director for Intelligence

Attachment:
As Stated

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Central Intelligence Agency
Office of the Deputy Director for Intelligence

DDI CHRONO
2 February 1984

NOTE TO: Jeremy Azrael
Policy Planning Council
Department of State

Per our conversation this morning.

Bob

Robert M. Gates

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Dobrynin and the Politburo

SUMMARY

Anatoliy Dobrynin probably does not get the hearing in Moscow's highest circles that he did in the halcyon days of US-Soviet relations in the early 1970s. Because of his now circumscribed access in Washington, he has less of interest to report. His boss, Foreign Minister Gromyko, has become more powerful--and reportedly more difficult to get along with--and Dobrynin may have run afoul of him in some way. Nevertheless, .. his skill in handling Americans is appreciated in Moscow, and he still makes an input into policy discussions on the US-Soviet relationship. As an experienced political animal, he probably avoids getting trapped in internal policy debates where there are winners and losers. If Dobrynin were to succeed in reestablishing the exclusive intermediary role he once had, both he and the Politburo would probably be pleased. Thus there are factors operating on several levels that will keep him in Washington for the foreseeable future, regardless of any bureaucratic ambitions he might have.

In the 1970s Dobrynin was a highly influential member of the Brezhnev national security team. His unique access in Washington's highest circles and his critical role in the back channel arms control negotiations made him uniquely valuable to Soviet policymakers. In particular, Dobrynin apparently enjoyed good access to Brezhnev.

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Today his circumstances are different. As US-Soviet relations have deteriorated and Dobrynin's access to US officials has become circumscribed, he has had less opportunity to exercise his skills on matters that thrust him into the immediate concerns of the Politburo. In effect, he no longer has anything special to communicate. His boss, Gromyko, who has had a major role in the conduct of foreign affairs since the days of Stalin, has acquired increasing political power and personal responsibility. He was a member of the powerful inner Politburo circle that aided Andropov's accession to the leadership in 1982, and became a First Deputy Premier in 1983. This has widened the political distance between Gromyko and Dobrynin, along with everybody else in the bureaucracy that Gromyko directs. And it is unlikely that Dobrynin's relationship with Andropov could be as close as it was with Brezhnev, simply because Dobrynin has not yet shared with Andropov a challenge comparable to that of the early SALT period, nor as close as the one Gromyko has with Andropov.

A case could be made that Dobrynin is in political difficulties. He did not accompany Gromyko to the foreign minister summits at Madrid and Stockholm, whereas our Ambassador to Moscow attended both. Dobrynin also did not attend the plenum of the Central Committee in December. Early in Andropov's tenure, we heard that rumors were circulating that Dobrynin was slated to return to Moscow as the Foreign Minister, although the scenario under which such a promotion could take place was never made clear. The rumors alone, however, would be enough to anger Gromyko if he got wind of them, especially if he thought that the rumormongers were acting on Dobrynin's behalf.

There have been some reports in the past, moreover, that relations between Gromyko and Dobrynin have not always been good. The reports are believable for a number of reasons. Gromyko's explosive outbursts of abuse at his subordinates are well known. Dobrynin's unique high-level access in the past, and the urbane and positive image he is able to project, in contrast to his dour and irascible boss, are enough to cause friction on the face of it. Gromyko has never been easy to work for.

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We are more ready to believe that Dobrynin may have fallen victim to Gromyko's ire--perhaps more than once--than we are to believe that Dobrynin's political fortunes have fundamentally deteriorated with the political apparatus in Moscow. Gromyko may have taken more personal responsibility for the conduct of the US-Soviet relationship than was the case before, and may have wanted to make that clear both to Dobrynin and others by not taking Dobrynin along to Madrid and Stockholm. As for the December plenum, it did not deal with foreign affairs, and Dobrynin has skipped plenums before. He may have been told to return to Washington to perform specific missions. Most importantly, as discussed later in this paper, Dobrynin has always been careful not to become a position-taker in a way that could make him a political loser. Simply being the Ambassador to the United States, and attempting to do his job in difficult times, is not enough to put him in jeopardy unless he has gone out on a limb beyond his instructions, and we have no evidence that he has ever done that.

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Moreover, upon his return to Washington, Dobrynin was quick off the mark in providing a US journalist with the new policy line--i.e., that the Soviets are prepared to resume substantive exchanges in the field of arms control despite their public inflexibility on returning to the INF talks. His remarks have been consistent with those of high-level party officials such as Vadim Zagladin back in Moscow, indicating that he is still very much in the main channel in carrying out policy directives.

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While presenting the official party line in Washington, Dobrynin probably would attempt to secure an exclusive intermediary role for himself similar to the one he enjoyed in earlier days. From his point of view, the ideal situation would be an unpublicized channel to the top levels of the US Administration. Failing that, Dobrynin would seek, simply as a matter of tactical advantage for the Soviet side, to meet one-on-one with his talking partner, speaking English with no interpreter present. We know that Gromyko himself during the 1970s encouraged Dobrynin to employ the latter tactic, and the former was considered so desirable by the Soviets in the past that Gromyko would probably concede its usefulness today regardless of his attitude toward Dobrynin. Obviously such a role would be highly desirable from Dobrynin's personal point of view as well.

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Dobrynin's caution would be likely to keep him from becoming involved in internal debates--at the Central Committee staff level--where there might be winner and losers. He is probably content to let others issue nuanced statements skirting around the question of whether detente is irreversible or whether the US ruling class is too fundamentally untrustworthy for the Soviet Union to deal with. As an ambassador, he would not engage in such discussions overtly anyway, but we suspect he does not do it in his cables to Moscow either.

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The people who know Dobrynin's skills and services best are probably Gromyko most of all, but also Andropov and Ustinov, as both men held positions during Brezhnev's regime that gave them access to his reporting. Dobrynin is undoubtedly very careful in his dealings with Gromyko.

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Soviet leaders probably see Dobrynin as uniquely useful where he is, regardless of the US-Soviet climate, and they seem to have no intention of returning him to the Foreign Ministry in Moscow in the foreseeable future. He has been in Washington for almost 22 years, is dean of the diplomatic corps, and knows how to cultivate Americans. Whatever his desire to return to a higher position in Moscow, he seems destined to remain in Washington as long as Gromyko remains Foreign Minister. Gromyko is 74, however, and Dobrynin is a decade younger. He is probably content to stay where he is, move with great care, and wait to see what the future holds for him.